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ABSTRACT

Right brain and left brain dominant people process information differently and need different techniques to learn how to become more creative. Various exercises can help students take advantage of both sides of their brains. Students must feel comfortable and unthreatened to reach maximal creativity, and a positive personal relationship with classmates and teacher should be fostered. Grading should be suspended for the first attempts, as students learn techniques and gain confidence. Students can be paired off, one blindfolded, and the other gently guiding the "blinded" student around to feel trees, cars, and other objects. Then students write about their experiences. Forced association exercises, in which students must write advertisements for a product by using something not usually associated with it, also are effective. For example, students were asked to write an ad for a dress shirt by using a gorilla in it, and numerous creative ads were elicited. Asking students to write mini-plots for ads (using selected characters, goals, obstacles and results from lists on the blackboard) is also a useful technique. Brainstorming techniques, such as asking students to come up with ideas for a restaurant serving nothing but fowl, should be taught, as should listing and guided imagery exercises. These and other exercises, all designed to help students explore different ways of developing ideas and visualizing creative approaches, prove useful in fostering creativity for both sides of the brain. (HB)

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Teaching Creativity For Right Brain and Left Brain Thinkers

Presented August 1992
AEJMC Advertising Division
Teaching Standards
Practice and Methodology

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ABSTRACT

Right brain and left brain dominant people process information differently and need different techniques to learn how to become more creative. The techniques described give students a number of options to choose from to best meet their learning style.

By helping students understand different ways of thinking and understand the process of creating, they can practice exercises that help them take maximum advantage of BOTH sides of their brain.

Being right brain dominant or left brain dominant greatly affects the way one perceives and processes information and, therefore, directly affects learning style. Although it is generally accepted that right brain people tend to be more "creative", this may be a misconception. All people are creative to some degree, and it may just be a matter of providing the right framework, environment, and methods for each person to be creative. The goal of this article is to examine techniques that allow all students, regardless of right brain or left brain orientation, to be successful in the art of creation.

Review of Literature

The earliest work on split brain functioning took place with severe epileptics who had their corpus callosa (the nerve bundle that carries messages from one side of the brain to the other) surgically severed. From these studies, we find that the right hemisphere and left hemisphere of the brain control very different functions and react to information in very different ways (Eccles, 1977; Sperry, 1966; Gazzaniga,1970; Ornstein, 1975). The left hemisphere controls the right hand, the right eye, the right ear, etc. It is specialized in such things as

- Verbal communication
- Abstract categorization
- Linear processes
- Rational, logical or analytical thinking
- Sequential thinking
- Detail in drawing

The right hemisphere controls the left hand, left eye and ear and specializes in:

- Visual and spatial perceptions
- Proper form in drawing
- Pattern recognition
- Intuitive thinking
- Holistic or gestalt observation as opposed to linear

Here, it may be helpful to explain more about how the brain processes information. The analytical left brain functions in a very set pattern and begins to put pieces of information into an orderly model--that which is most stable psychologically. As more information comes in, it adds the information to the model as best it can. Eventually, however, a piece of information may come in that doesn't fit the pre-arranged model. The only way to make it fit would be to take the model apart and reorganize.

But, according to Edward de Bono, this is less likely to happen in the left brain as information is processed in the order it is acquired. He compares it to a rainstorm. The first drop forms a depression, more drops create a gully and yet more drops can form a rainwashed landscape.

Each piece of information serves to deepen the pattern already started by the first few pieces that were acquired. (Hofland, 1985)

This "pattern making" is a distinct disadvantage in the creative process. Patterns get established more and more rigidly. If a problem presents itself that resembles a previous problem, it makes alternate approaches or solutions increasingly difficult...it just serves to dig the river deeper. As we have seen, sequence of arrival of the information is also important on how the patterns are formed. Like a river, a small diversion early on can make a huge difference later.

Finally, when the left brain is forced to choose between positions, it will try to force the idea into a preconceived category, as opposed to trying to take the best from many options and combining them.

The right brain, in contrast, tries to take all the information and rearranges it until the information is organized in a workable solution. It is not constrained about the order of information input and thus is free to manipulate the information into a new pattern and new idea.

Now, we know from research that these two separately functioning hemispheres communicate with one another through nerve impulses along the corpus collosum which serves as the regulator for this cross over communication. Thus, when one hemisphere is sending information, it blocks the information from traveling from the other hemisphere. Whichever hemisphere is in command at the time wins, so conflict between the two hemispheres is avoided.

One author recounts this example that reflects what can happen:

> **After a bad shot in a golf game, the battle begins as the player berates herself verbally for making the bad shot. As we know, this is the left brain that does the talking. But to whom is it talking? Apparently the spatially oriented right brain. Perhaps not so oddly, the game goes down hill after this. The left brain has gained control over the right brain and the spatial coordination needed for the game is overcome by the left brain, which is not suited to the task. (Hofland, 1985).** (Perhaps this is also why these games seem relaxing--the person is switching off the analytical side of the brain while playing successfully.)

There is a strong resemblance in this analogy to that of designing an advertisement, printed piece or storyboard.

Creative Techniques for Reaching Both Sides of the Brain

As instructors, there is an obligation to reach and teach all the students in a class. When teaching courses in creativity, such as copywriting, design and scripting, there must be an effort to reach all the students, regardless of information processing orientation, and provide them with methods that will help them succeed.

There are many different ways of learning and instructors should attempt to meet the learning needs of students to best match learning styles (see Christensen, 1991 for more discussion).

The following techniques have been used successfully over a number of years. Some students prefer one method and some are very uncomfortable with others. However, by providing a range of ways to tap into creativity, most students can find a method that works for them.

Some exercises are designed to stimulate ideas and creativity, while others are designed to require students to use both sides of the brain.

Non-threatening Environment.

Creating a proper environment to stimulate creativity requires proper procedure and techniques. Students must feel comfortable and not threatened in the environment where they are creating. One of the most threatening elements in the classroom is the instructor and the threat of one's creativity being judged by the perceived "expert". Fear shuts down creativity immediately. In the creative classroom, grades need to be suspended for the first attempts, as students learn techniques and gain confidence that they can be creative. Weight the grading scale to the end of the term when students have had a chance to develop creative skills.

The second part of a non-threatening environment is feeling comfortable with the people around you. This requires feeling comfortable with and trusting your classmates. Two techniques are effectively used here.

The first day of class is always an awkward (and usually dry) time for introductions, course objectives, syllabus and grading standards. This provides an opportunity for the instructor to do something different and let the students know this is NOT going to be an ordinary course. There could be any number of techniques used here, but one that works well is the Trust Walk. If it's nice outside (and even if it's not) get the students out of the classroom. Explain that creativity can happen anywhere--not just the classroom. This is a course they will have to live. One job of the copywriter, or any creative writer, is to be able to describe. However, it generally falls on shoulders of the graphic designer to work with the visual, so the copywriter must be able to describe the sounds, the feel, the smells, the tastes and most importantly, the emotions. Pair off the students and have one student blindfold the other with blindfolds provided by the instructor. Then, have the sighted student gently walk the other student around to explore trees, ground, fences, cars, pinecones or whatever else they happen across in about 5 minutes. Then have the blindfolded student sit and just listen for at least 2 full minutes. Then take off the blindfolds and have the students jot down a few notes about their experience to refresh their memory later. Have the students exchange places (note: paybacks are not fun)!

Upon returning to the classroom, have students write about their experience in as much sensory detail as they possibly can and also to describe their emotional processes. Students then share with the class. This instructor has found that this techniques works well for beginning

students. First, they are being told that this isn't your ordinary course. Second, they begin writing immediately and descriptive writing seems to be easy and not too threatening. And finally, students get to know (and have to trust) another student in the class. This is a very right brain exercise, as it forces the students to use non-visual or verbal senses to explore the environment around them and to visualize the objects and setting. Then, the right brain must "communicate" this information to the left brain for verbalization.

The assignment for the next class period expands on this sharing. Students are asked to recall a vivid childhood experience to write about in one to two pages. Let students know that these will be shared with the class as this instructor has gotten some very emotional material. After each student has shared these memories with the class, go back around to see if students remember each others story (they almost always do). Take the most vivid detail that the students remember and assign each student a one page description of that detail (different for each student depending on the story). These are read aloud and are read by the instructor for grammar errors, but not graded. This assignment accomplishes two things. First, students are sharing and getting comfortable with one another beyond the typical "name, major & home town" and students get a feel for the cultural diversity of the class. Second, they continue to work on detail, description and emotions. Again, this exercise takes a right brain activity (visualizing) and forces students to describe using left brain activity (verbalization and language skills).

At this point, the instructor has established some important first impressions--this course is different, students are expected to share work and ideas and, hopefully, that this is an open environment.

Forced Associations

This technique is good for the left brained, word oriented person. Ask five to seven students for a noun and list them on the board. Then choose a parity product without a lot of clear product features (like a dress shirt or a deodorant). The idea is to use the noun on the board and make a connection with the assigned product as the concept for an advertisement. Students have to come up with at least three ad scenarios using each item. Bonus points if the student can tie all five items to the product in one ad concept. As an example, use the dress shirt and one noun--perhaps a gorilla. Possible scenarios:

- Show the shirt on the gorilla as he pounds his chest and jumps around to show how strong the stitching and buttons are.
- Show the gorilla putting on the shirt and he transforms into a handsome man ("Makes anyone look good")
- Have two gorillas pulling on the shirt, but it won't rip.

This technique works because it takes the verbal skills that students are used to working with and forces new ways of matching up ideas. It forces students out of the "rivers and gullies" thinking of the left brain and forces new connections and ideas. It also begins to provide visual images and "concepts" rather than just copy. The number of ad concepts is limited only by the number of nouns one can find in the dictionary.

Lots of Plots

Many great ads, especially on television, are based on a mini-story. Any story needs to have a setting, characters, plot, conflict and resolution while still selling the product. Many students have a difficult time coming up with ideas. "Lots of Plots" helps students get basic ideas that are out of the ordinary. Seldom do the ideas actually pan out into a full story or commercial, but it helps get students thinking about the elements and many times just changing one element may produce the idea for a final spot.

This technique is similar to Forced Associations because it makes students explore new combinations. Make four columns on the blackboard. They are labeled: Character, Goal, Obstacle and Result. Under each heading make a list as in the example below.

Character	Goal	Obstacle	Result
Mother	Feed Kids	Must Work Late	Kids Help
Girlfriend	Have Fun	No Money	Popular
Kids	Make Money	Have To Work	Make Money
Neighbor	Be Popular	Bad Breath	Fall In Love
Etc.	Etc.	Etc.	Etc.

Try to get at least six or seven possibilities in each category. Then mix and match different words (one or more from each column) and link the idea in some way to the product. As and example: Mother has to work and can't feed the kids. A neighbor feeds them using the product and they fall in love with it. Again, this forces the brain out of established patterns and allows it to explore new ideas.

A Fowl Assignment

This uses the standard brainstorming technique. This is a group activity that benefits both right and left brain thinkers as it can generate verbal and visual ideas. The goal of brainstorming is to list as many ideas as possible. Many times, one person's idea will trigger something for another person. The instructor writes down all the ideas on a large pad and posts the ideas for others to look at and work off of. In brainstorming, there is no criticism allowed and no evaluating of ideas until the time period is up. Generally, at least one half to one hour should be allowed to really explore lots of ideas.

In this exercise, students are instructed to design and open a new restaurant that serves nothing but fowl--any kind as long as it is fowl. The instructor sets the parameters and rules, which

are basically "there are no rules". Students are encouraged to get any idea out no matter how strange or outlandish or bad. Bad ideas have to be cleared out to make room for the good ideas. As an instructor, be prepared for college slang in the ideas as there are many words that rhyme with bird, goose and duck. Try to come up with names, menu items and promotions. Soon, students start asking questions like "where is this located?" and "who are we catering to?". Without even talking about target audiences, the students intuitively discover the need for audience identification.

In this assignment, students learn the creative technique of brainstorming. Beyond that, they once again share with each other in a lively, non-traditional classroom, and lead the instructor into talking about target markets and how the marketing and creative approach must be tailored to the market.

Lists

Lists, though not a tremendously powerful creative tool, can serve as an idea starter for some students. There are many books that offer lists with items such as: make it larger, make it smaller, look at it from the inside, put it in an unusual setting, etc. The main advantage of lists, is that they do get the student thinking in new directions. and out of tried and true thought patterns.

Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is based on relaxation techniques. This utilizes right brain techniques for the visualization and again makes the students transfer that imagining to a verbal/written format. Have the students sit in a relaxed position and dim the lights. Either a commercial tape of deep relaxation techniques can be used or the instructor can guide the relaxation process. Getting to a very relaxed state is a skill that generally isn't acquired on the first try. Do it for a few minutes during several labs, until the students are comfortable with the relaxation process. Then, have students close their eyes and take the students on an imaginary trip. One trip that works well, is a trip to a lake in the north woods. Have students imagine the lake, the blue sky, the trees and wildlife. Have them explore sensory details like the sounds of the waves lapping, the feel of the water or the smell of the pine trees. Guide the students on a five to ten minute tour. Upon returning from the trip, students are assigned to write a tourism brochure for a lodge on this scenic lake. In the assignment sheet, students are given some facts about the lodge and activities available. The students are instructed to use the images from the visualization exercise to describe the peacefulness and to develop images for the brochure.

The Bad Ad

One technique to break out of linear thinking and into the more creative lateral thinking is the reversal process. The activity upsets the normal way of thinking and allows the information to come together in a new way. In the reversal process, ask the students to come up with the worst ad

that they can for the product. In short, break all the rules and do something totally terrible. Once the student has analyzed what is bad, it helps set the stage to create something good.

Discussion

Each student has a learning style uniquely her own. Effective education recognizes and reinforces individual learning style to make every student successful. By recognizing the differences in right brain and left brain learning, and by expanding the opportunities to learn in each mode, the instructor can help all students be successful and creative.

Each of these techniques may be useful during different segments of the copywriting process. The first steps of the creative process are generally left brain activities. This involves defining the problem, reading or talking about the product to gather facts and analyzing the audience. Next the creative person needs generate possible solutions and this is best accomplished in the right brain mode. Good ideas are many times at first vague and hard to verbalize to others. This is because the right brain lacks the verbal skills to voice the idea. The third step involves transferring these right brain ideas into the left brain and onto paper.

These exercises are designed to help the students explore different ways of developing ideas and to explore different ways of thinking and visualizing. Students should be encouraged to try these techniques outside the classroom until they are comfortable with the techniques that seem to work best for their individual style of creating.

By helping students understand different ways of thinking and understand the process of creating, they can practice exercises that help them take maximum advantage of BOTH sides of their brain.

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